EXTREMISM

Antisemitism in Amsterdam: Even Soccer Fans Cannot Escape Double Standards

ANTISEMITISM | November 12, 2024 | Alexandra Kuzmina — CEP Intern

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Waking up Friday morning to “Amsterdam” trending on X was not exactly surprising. The last year has been one of big changes, political shifts and loud slogans, virtually everywhere in the world—but also definitely in the Netherlands, where I am based. I reluctantly clicked on the link, with a sigh resembling “what now?,” but almost immediately lost all the remnants of sleep I had in me.

The first video I saw was of a man on the ground, covering his face, while being kicked by at least three other men, screaming “I am not Jewish! I am not Jewish!” Next followed a video of a crowd running down the streets of A’dam, screams in the background, and police cars somewhat aimlessly driving up and down the streets. Then, pictures of Israeli passports—obviously stolen. Then, a video of someone falling down onto the train tracks, preceded by excessive beating on the platform. “Say ‘Free Palestine!’” – the voice behind the camera demanded – “Say ‘Free Palestine!’”

I admit I don’t follow football, and wouldn’t know the difference between leagues, federations, and even teams, but I knew the Maccabi Tel Aviv were here for a game with Ajax because unrest was well-anticipated. As a preventative measure, Amsterdam's mayor, Femke Halsema, banned all

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measure, Amsterdam's mayor, Femke Halsema, banned all announced protest actions during the days when Maccabi Fanatics would be in the city. But, very symbolically, it was the Ajax supporters, F-side, who said they would not tolerate a pro-Palestine demonstration anywhere near the stadium.

Ajax and Maccabi Tel Aviv fans are interesting bedfellows, for reasons perhaps only a true football fan can follow. I confess the logic completely escapes me but it comes down to the fact that Amsterdam's Ajax is *unofficially* Jewish. The connection dates back several decades when the club's F-side adopted Jewish symbols and references – they display Israeli flags, get tattoos of the Star of David, sing "Hava Nagila," and refer to themselves as "Super Jews":

About thirty years ago, the other teams' supporters started calling us Jews because there was a history of Jews in Ajax, so we took it up as a point of pride and now it has become our identity.

Many noted that the adoption of the 'Jewish' identity was rather a provocation, as it also allowed the competing football clubs to essentially adopt Antisemitism as a valid form of expression of rivalry – Rotterdam's Feyenoord fans, for example, were filmed chanting "Hamas, Hamas, Jews to the Gas."

The link between Ajax and Maccabi Tel Aviv fans has been

strong for a long time, and both groups have largely been on the same wavelength, having engaged in acts of hooliganism, like virtually every other European soccer club at some point in their history, resulting in a (certainly) very loud, but surprisingly cohesive experience this time around as well – the keys to Amsterdam were basically handed over to the "Super Jews" and the visiting the Maccabi Fanatics.

The unrest associated with the match itself apparently did not exceed the typical scale of major football disturbances compared to other matches. There have been reports of an assault on a taxi driver, and the Maccabi Fanatics were filmed chanting, and tore a Palestinian flag from a facade of a house at Rokin, Amsterdam's city center. However disturbing to the ears, the chant is, actually, very average, compared to other football chants, in its linguistic richness and melodic soundness. And frankly, tearing down of Palestinian flags is also not uncommon in the Netherlands in general – both by opposed individuals and government officials.

For comparison, there were 14 arrests around Ajax vs. Besiktas match at the end of September, and an almost identical video of the fans chanting while going down the escalator. Football and hooliganism have been extensively researched and share a strong correlation, and so, while some of what Maccabi Fanatics engaged in was disturbing, it should not be surprising, nor is it at all different to what this

city goes through with every big game.

What followed the match, however, had little to do with football or typical excessive post-match behavior. Images of Maccabi fans (and anyone deemed Israeli) being chased, beaten and run over have started circulating on social media in the early hours on Friday, with those behind the cameras only interested in one thing: “Are you Jewish?”

These videos, with Israelis on the ground, in the canals, and running away, at first may seem random, singular, separate; but there is something about them that just felt coordinated – for one, the sinister fact that they were being filmed, **just like on October 7th**. Later investigations have confirmed that Telegram and Snapchat groups were used to rally people together, to attack Maccabi supporters, specifically targeting and naming “the Jews.”

With at least five hospitalized, and up to 30 injured, the eventful night has been condemned as a “pogrom,” analogized with “Kristallnacht,” and widely condemned as antisemitic, from Dick Schoof to Benjamin Netanyahu. While accurate, they seem to omit the reason why it is actually so – Israelis, Jews are not *allowed* to be like everyone else. They are not allowed to have a hooligan nationalist football fanbase, like every other country does; they are not allowed to be prosecuted for public disorder without being subjected

to complete deconstruction of their identity. Moreover, it seems that coordinated and targeted attacks on foreign nationals, even if misbehaving ones, are considered acceptable only when the targets are Israelis – much less is usually needed to question and reevaluate diplomatic relationships.

62 people have been arrested so far.

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Fact:

On October 7, 2023, Hamas invaded southern Israel where, in the space of eight hours, hundreds of armed terrorists perpetrated mass crimes of brutality, rape, and torture against men, women and children. In the biggest attack on Jewish life in a single day since the Holocaust, 1,200 were killed, and 251 were taken hostage into Gaza—where 101 remain. One year on, antisemitic incidents have increased by record numbers

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